

The Collective Edge
Guide to Team Debriefs

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"An eye-opening guide to making teams more than the sum of their individual parts. Essential reading."
—DANIEL H. PINK, author of *Drive* and *The Power of Regret*

Unlocking the Secret Power of Groups

Colin M. Fisher

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Guide to Team Debriefs

Individually, take about 20 minutes to complete parts 1 and 2 (or complete in advance of the debrief meeting). Your comments will form the basis of your group discussion. Suggestions for running the group discussion can be found further below.

Part 1

A. Critical Incidents:¹ What were the most important moments that shaped your team’s trajectory? These moments can be positive or negative, gratifying or challenging—the idea is to construct a narrative of your team’s experience that captures everyone’s perspective. As you discuss the incidents, consider the following questions:

- Why did the incident occur as it did?
- How did the team handle the situation? What happened next?
- Why did each member do what he or she did during the incident?
- How might they have handled the situation more effectively?

1. W. A. Kahn (2009), “The Student’s Guide to Successful Project Teams,” pp. 231–232.

B. Think back to the purpose your team set at the beginning of the project. In what ways did your team achieve this purpose? In what ways did it fall short of achieving it? As you answer this question, please think broadly about the criteria for team effectiveness, including: (a) doing high quality work, (b) becoming a stronger team over time, (c) the learning and satisfaction of team members, and (d) the quality of relationships between team members.

C. What aspects of your individual contributions to the team experience are you most proud of? What aspects of your individual contributions to the team do you feel like you could have improved?

D. What have you learned from your participation in this team that you hope to apply to other teams (i.e. at work, school, or in other situations) in the future?

Suggestions for Running the Group Discussion

The team should assign member(s) responsibility for (a) facilitating the discussion, enforcing discussion norms, and staying on topic; (b) keeping time; and (c) taking careful notes in preparation for submitting your team report.

- 1. WHAT HAPPENED:** Based on individual responses to Part 1A, begin by constructing a timeline of critical incidents. Allow each team member to share their most important incident, striving to continue sharing new ones and allowing all members to contribute before anyone shares a second incident. Focus on first sharing all important incidents before discussing their meaning in more depth. If members have different interpretations of events, you should discuss those after all critical incidents are shared.
- 2. ASSESSING TEAM EFFECTIVENESS:** Have each member share their observations from Part 1B. Note where there are significant disagreements about members' assessments of achieving the team's purposes and to understand the reasons for those differing assessments.
- 3. SHARING SELF-ASSESSMENTS:** Have each member share their self-assessments from Part 1C. Other members can ask clarifying questions, but not disputing member accounts. If your feedback to this person will be radically different than their self-assessment, consider telling them so after the meeting before completing the Feedback assignment.
- 4. MEMBER TAKEAWAYS:** Have each member share their takeaways from Part 1D. Other members can ask clarifying questions, but be sure that all members have adequate time to share.

5. End the meeting by thinking about the effort you have collectively put into this team and project so far. Thank each other for whatever you can. Appreciate others for what they did, large and small. Forgive them for what they did not do, as much as you can, openly or silently.

6. Appoint one member to summarize this meeting in a document and circulate to all members for comment and corrections.

Fun bonus exercise: For my teams, I buy thank-you cards and have all members write something they are thankful for to all other members. Each member receives one card with messages from all other members.